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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NAS Monthly Report January 2005:

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In January, Colombian National Police (CNP) sprayed 15,723 hectares of coca and finalized plans for a large manual poppy eradication campaign to start in February in Narino. A Colombian Army helicopter carrying sixteen Counter-Narcotics (CD) Brigade soldiers and four crewmembers crashed, killing all aboard. NAS and CNP Anti-Narcotics Police (DIRAN) participated in planning the second phase of an Operation Firewall combined arms exercise to combat go-fast boats. NAS and CNP agreed to ARAVI's first ever flying-hour management program designed to make more efficient use of aircraft. Carbineros Rural Mobile Police (EMCAR) reported that in 2004 their squadrons captured 1,639 guerrillas and 275 narco-traffickers. Colombia's maritime ports received an excellent security assessment by the US Coast Guard. End Summary.

Eradication and Interdiction

2. (U) During January, OV-10s operating from San Jose sprayed approximately 5,340 hectares of coca, while AT-802s operating from Tumaco sprayed approximately 9,953 hectares of coca. The T-65 aircraft package sprayed approximately 430 hectares of coca during this period while operating from Quibdo and Armenia, the first operations conducted by the program in this area. This combined effort resulted in a total of approximately 15,723 hectares of coca sprayed during the month of January.

3. (U) On January 13, a Plan Colombia UH-60L crashed during a night-time operation in the department of Narino, killing four crewmembers and 16 members of the Colombian Army Counter-Narcotics (CD) Brigade. Accident investigators from the State Department, Colombian Army, Federal Aviation Administration, DynCorp, and the helicopter's manufacturer, Sikorsky quickly initiated an investigation. At this time, the investigation is ongoing.

4. (U) The CD Brigade destroyed 19 HCl laboratories, including 9 in the space of a week following the helicopter crash that killed their colleagues.

5. (SBU) Eradication and COLAR aircraft were involved in one incident involving hostile fire during January, resulting in a total of 17 impacts for the month. Eradication OV-10Ds received 14 impacts, while UH-1Ns received one impact. A Plan Colombia UH-1N aircraft received two impacts during the same mission while serving as an escort helicopter for the Eradication aircraft.

6. (U) During January, COLAR Plan Colombia helicopters continued to support CD Brigade troops and Eradication operations in Larandia and Tumaco, as well as a High Value Target mission in Apiay and training operations in Tolemaida. This month saw Plan Colombia helicopters flying over 1,983 hours, while transporting 3,156 passengers and 78,900 pounds of cargo. Forty-five medical evacuation missions were completed this month as well.

7. (SBU) The Plan Colombia Helicopter Program supported U.S. Army Special Forces training operations in Tolemaida by providing airframes for air assault and fast-rope training this month. In addition, the program began night vision goggle refresher training and instructor pilot qualification training with four Colombian National Police pilots, including two UH-60 pilots and two UH-1HII pilots. This training greatly assists the National Police in their efforts to reconstitute their night vision goggle program.

Air Bridge Denial

8. (U) There was one Phase III event and one Law Enforcement end game during this period. In January 2005, over 5200 tracks were sorted over Colombia, of which 33 were declared Unidentified, Assumed Suspect (UAS) aircraft.

Manual Poppy Eradication (DIRAN)

19. (SBU) The Colombian national Police, Plan Colombia Office of the Presidencia, and NAS made preparations in January for a early February launch of a thirty-day manual poppy eradication campaign around Ipiales, Nario. Eradication labor will be provided by 30 campesinos who will be guided and protected by the DIRAN's 26th company. This is the same area where the 26th Company and the COLAR's Grupo CABAL concentrated manual poppy eradication operations in 2004, resulting in the eradication of over 1,000 hectares of poppy. NAS has encouraged the GOC to focus manual eradication campaigns on poppy, where manual eradication sweeps are swifter and more efficient than in the coca fields. Besides planning and logistical support, NAS also supplied GPS units, brush cutters, and overnight gear for the operation. NAS also designed and duplicated fliers warning that Colombian asset seizure and forfeiture laws are now being applied to land where illicit crops are planted. Security forces will distribute these during this and other manual eradication campaigns to deter replanting.

Firewall Exercise Planning Conference

10. (SBU) Representatives from the Colombian Navy, DIRAN, Air Force, UK Embassy, DEA, MILGP and NAS began planning the second Firewall Field Training Exercise that will be held April 4-14, near Santa Marta on the Caribbean coast. Exercise will test reactions of Firewall units against three separate scenarios, each simulating launching of narco go-fasts. The newly installed Firewall communications network will also be tested during the exercise.

CNP Aviation (ARAVI)

11. (U) The three largest components of ARAVI's fleet clocked 1,104 mission hours in January: the UH-1H II helicopters flew 690 mission hours with an operational readiness rate of 82 percent, our Bell 212 helicopters flew 221 mission hours with an operational readiness rate of 75 percent, and our UH-60L helicopters flew 193 mission hours with an operational readiness rate of 77 percent. NAS and ARAVI agreed to a flying hour program (the first in ARAVI's history) for 2005. Construction of the new hangar complex at ARAVI's Guaymaral base is on schedule. NAS/ARAVI hired a new safety advisor who will arrive at post in March.

Law Enforcement/Public Security

12. (U) One new Mobile Carabineros Squadron (EMCAR) and 200 replacement policemen for the existing squadrons began training in Espinal in January. To date, a total of 40 Carabineros Squadrons have been trained. The Combat medics course also started in January with 49 students, 30 EMCAR, 15 DIRAN, 1 GREAS (Colombian Navy), 1 Police Anti-Terrorism Reaction Unit (GRATE), and 2 others.

13. (U) The CNP's Carbineros (EMCAR) reported their final results for CY2004. Last year, EMCAR Squadrons captured 275 narcotraffickers and 1,639 guerrillas (815 FARC/ELN & 824 AUC). The squadrons also captured 3,127 common criminals. They seized 1,655 weapons, 8,473 kgs of coca base, 46,600 gallons of liquid precursors and 142,485 kgs of solid precursors. Overall, EMCAR Squadrons and the new Municipio CNP units were largely responsible for the significant improvement in public security throughout rural Colombia.

Port Security Program

14. (U) The US Coast Guard conducted an assessment of Colombia's international maritime port's compliance with the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) code. Their assessment indicated security at Colombia's ports is substantially better than other ports in the region and specifically praised the cooperation between the port operators and the anti-narcotics police that is the essence of NAS's Port Security Program.

Demand Reduction

15. (U) In January NAS delivered computers to support the NGO Surgir based in Medellin. Surgir is one of the largest and most effective private drug prevention organizations in Colombia. The computers will enable them to expand and make more efficient their teacher training programs.

Environment

16. (U) From January 16-26, the spray program carried out the first phase of the annual ground verification of coca eradication. Phase one covered the departments of Nario, Putumayo, Caqueta, and Meta and included evaluation of spray

effectiveness, estimations of collateral damage, and soil sampling to test residuality of the spray mixture. Verifications are conducted by a broad, inter-institutional team which includes scientists from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the GOC's Ministry of Environment, Housing and Territorial Development, the GOC's Institute of Agriculture and Husbandry, the National Directorate of Dangerous Drugs, as well as representatives from NAS, the INL Air Wing, and the Colombian National Police. The Organization of American State's Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission's (CICAD) spray monitoring initiative also sent observers for the second phase of verification, which is currently underway in Norte de Santander.

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